AN UNCANNY SECRET.

GRIM MYSTERY THAT LURKS WITHIN AN OLD ENGLISH CASTLE.

Three Men Only Know the Truth About the Terrifying Curse Which Rests Upon the Ancient Habitation, and Their Lips Are Sealed.

Near the border of two Scottish counties, set in the middle of a broad and fertile strath and protected from the northern blasts by a range of lofty mountains, there stands and has stood for generations an ancient feudal castle.

Although the oldest wing dates from the thirteenth century, the greater part of it was built in Jacobean days and with its numerous turrets, battlements, corbels and pinnacles recalls the glories of Chantilly and other French chateaux of the same period. It belongs, together with the surrounding estate, to a wealthy peer, whose grandfather married a north of England heiress with a dowry of over a million sterling. During the greater part of the year the castle is untenanted save by a few servants and caretakers, for the owner spends his winters abroad and his summers in the English seat brought into the family by the above mentioned heiress. But during the autumn months it is full of life and gayety, for its kindly lord and lady, who have many children and grandchildren and a host of friends, keep open house then in their old Scottish home, and its halls and corridors, narrow passages and winding staircases echo with the sound of merry voices and the tread of youthful feet from morning till night.

Cheerful, however, as the invited guest finds the old castle and warm as is the welcome extended to him within its walls, he must be possessed of little curiosity and less imagination if he does not feel his pulse somewhat quickened and his sleep somewhat broken during the period of his residence there, for he has probably heard already something of the weird associations which cling to the house and its owners and of the mysterious secret said to be known only to the head of the family, to his heir and to one other person, a secret so grim and terrible as to affect the whole lives of those who learn it and make them different from other men.

No clew to the mystery has ever been given by any one of the three depositaries of it, but popular belief has long connected it with a secret chamber in the castle which rumor assigns as the habitation of a strange half human creature of terrifying aspect and fabulous age, the incarnate embodiment of the curse which rests upon the house. In the gayest moments enjoyed by those who during the bright days of early autumn throng the guest chambers of the castle there is always an indefinable feeling of some weird presence within its walls.

"My dear young lady," were the words of the host to one who was paying him her first visit as he bade her good night, "it is, I know, the custom of ladies to sit up late in one another's rooms chatting and so on. Now, that is not allowed here. When you go to your room tonight remain in it and lock the door." Once on a wet summer's afternoon some young people were enjoying a noisy game of billiard fives in the hall. While the merry din was at its height the tall, bowed figure of the host was suddenly observed to be standing in the midst of the party. "I want to ask you all," he said in his quiet, courteous tones, "to go up to your rooms at once and to remain in them until a bell rings, when you will be quite at liberty to come down again." Instantly, like the Arabs of the poem, the players "silently stole away" to their respective chambers. After a lapse of some twenty minutes a bell did ring. Down they all came and resumed their game where it had been broken off. No allusion was made by any one to the mysterious behest they had received.

In a quiet corner of the old castle there is a quaint little chapel, dating from the restoration, decorated by a Dutch artist of the time and fitted up in recent days with a rich altar and other accessories by the present owner, who spends much time there engaged in solitary devotions. A year or two ago a young officer, whose visit had been shortened by a sudden summons to rejoin his regiment, had arranged to leave the castle at an early hour in the morning. Quitting his chamber about dawn, he took a wrong turning in the uncertain light and, pushing open a swing door, found himself in the chapel, which he had not before entered. At the far end he observed, with great surprise, a motionless figure kneeling near the altar and moved noiselessly up to see who it was. He recognized his host, still in evening dress, as he had parted from him some seven hours previously.

A young medical man was not long ago staying at the castle by invitation of its owner, who had made his acquaintance abroad, and, being something of an invalid, had asked him to come and take a few weeks' holiday in Scotland and at the same time to give him the benefit of his professional skill. A room was assigned to him in one of the towers, and he was in the full enjoyment of his visit when it was suddenly brought to an end in a strange fashion.

Coming home unexpectedly early one afternoon from shooting, leaving most of his fellow guests still in the stubbles, and mounting to his turret chamber, he noticed a singular circumstance. A stain which he had often observed in the carpet under the window was now visible exactly at the opposite corner of the room, showing that during his few hours' absence the whole of the furniture must have been moved out of the apartment and the carpet taken up.

The impulse came upon him to repeat the process. Out into the passage accordingly went bed, chairs, tables, wardrobe and everything else; up came the carpet, and there in the center of the floor was the inevitable trapdoor. Lifting it, he descried a steep flight of steps, which he descended, lighted candle in hand, and found at the bottom a narrow, winding passage, along which he cautiously made his way. Suddenly he was brought up short by a dead white plastered wall, barring his farther advance, and, putting out his hand to touch it, his finger went half an inch into the plaster, which was soft, wet and evidently quite newly laid on. Smoothing it over as best he could (not an easy task without a proper implement), he quietly retraced his steps to him room, rearranged carpet and furniture exactly as he had found them and went down to tea, keeping his own counsel and saying nothing to any one of his adventure.

Next morning while he was still in bed a note was brought him from his host's lawyer, who was staying in the castle. It inclosed a check and briefly informed him that his services were no longer required and that a carriage would be in readiness to take him to the railway station at the earliest hour convenient to himself.—London Mail.

NERVE ON THE GALLOWS.

When the Hangman Quit, the Convict Promptly Hanged Himself.

Some time ago a Russian criminal was executed in St. Petersburg. He had during two years murdered twelve persons, the last one being a priest. The law did not show this monster any mercy, but speedily condemned him to death.

Stebljanski was the name of this wholesale murderer, and he hoped to the last for clemency. When the death warrant was read and the keeper informed him that he had but six hours to live he raged and swore to revenge himself in the most horrible manner. After being left alone in the cell the first thing he did was to break his lamp, and, procuring some matches, he set fire to the oil. In a moment the flames broke through the windows, and the entire building was for a time threatened with destruction. Fortunately the fire was discovered in time and got under control before much damage had been done, but in the meantime a terrible struggle ensued between the keepers and the criminal, who had fortified himself with an iron bar taken from his bedstead. The first man to enter the cell was knocked senseless, and it was only after being almost suffocated with smoke that the prisoner was finally overpowered. Next morning the execution took place. The condemned man ascended the scaffold with much bravado, made a thorough examination of the same and finally declared the rope was too short.

"I cannot get my head in the loop," he said, "and, though it will cause me some inconvenience to wait, I will smoke a cigarette while you are having it attended to."

He lighted a cigarette and, turning to the executioner, made a speech, pointing out the detestable in his profession, and as a condemned criminal in Russia has certain rights no one dared to interrupt him.

The executioner, who was really a tender hearted man, became visibly affected by the moralizing words of the murderer and, turning to the crowd assembled before the scaffold, declared that his conscience did not allow him to proceed or to take a fellow man's life, and he then and there resigned his position and departed amid the shouts of the assemblage.

This caused great confusion among the representatives of the law, for where could they in a hurry get another executioner? The question was, however, solved by the condemned man, who declared that he would execute himself as soon as he got through smoking. He started an interesting conversation with the priest during the five minutes or so which he had left and recommended that he read Count Tolstoi's latest book, which contains striking remarks about the relation of capital punishment to the teachings of Christianity. He then threw a kiss to a pretty girl among the spectators, stuck his head in the loop and kicked away the trap beneath his feet.—Washington Star.

The Sling Among the Israelites.

The inhabitants of Palestine made use in very ancient times of the sling, the most skillful in its use being the tribe of Benjamin, whose boast it was never to miss their aim. What makes their skill appear more surprising was that they managed to sling with the left hand. The men who came to David's help at Ziklag were no less adroit. They used at will either the right hand or the left. The sling was also the favorite weapon of shepherds, who with it drove away wild beats preying on their flocks. This makes David's victory over the giant Goliath less surprising, as he had no doubt great practice in the use of this instrument while guarding his father's sheep.

The Loafing Business.

My son, follow now in the footsteps of the loafer and make no example of him who is born tired, for verily I say unto you his business is overstocked, the seats on the corner are all taken, and the whittling places are all occupied. It is better to saw wood at two bits a cord than whittle at a whittling match and abuse the government. My son, whilst thou hast in thy skull the sense of a jaybird break away from the cigarette habit, for, lo, thy mind is less intelligent than a store dummy. Yes; thou art a cipher with the rim knocked off.—Pollver Monthly.

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A MAN AGAINST A NATION.

The Most Curious European War That Ever Was Waged.

The most curious European war ever waged was that which in the sixteenth century, the period of the reformation and the renaissance, was carried on single handed for between five and six years between a bankrupt grocer of Berlin and the elector of Saxony, who was the most powerful German prince of the period. The grocer's name was Hans Kohlhase, and the immediate cause of the quarrel was the arresting of two of his horses in the elector's territory, he being a subject of the elector of Brandenburg. Failing to get redress, he adopted what was then a perfectly legal expedient and declared formal war on the realm of Saxony. The declaration was accepted in due form, and the war began.

The extraordinary part of the story is that the grocer kept the war up for nearly six years practically single handed and even went to the extremity of declaring war on his own sovereign in the meantime before he was caught. He burned farms and even villages, employed mercenaries after the fashion of the times and made himself the terror of the district. He was finally influenced to stop hostilities by Luther, and after he had taken the sacrament from his hands he was betrayed into a further act of hostility by treachery and, being captured, suffered death on the wheel after refusing an act of grace which granted him the painless and honorable death of the sword. The story is perhaps the strangest of all the romances of that romantic age.

He Saw the Joke.

Here is a true story of a curious personality well known to many professional men in London today: He is a Scot, whose business ability is above the average, but everything he does is done with the air of a man constantly wrestling with some problem of the soul. He rarely speaks unless spoken to. He never smiles, and his eyes have a fixed but intense expression. One day he was returning to London with several companions. The whole party were Scotch, but the companions were of genial type. One of them told a humorous tale, over which the rest laughed uproariously. Not so the human problem. He sat in a corner of the railway carriage glowering at his mirthful friends. Half an hour afterward, however, when all were standing at a street corner before separating he took one aside and said solemnly and slowly: "Ye would obsairve that I did na' laugh at yond' story. Well, I saw the joke. Ye might not think it, but I have a keen sense of humor."—London News.

An Impossible Task.

The committee waited upon the successful man.

"Your fame has preceded you," they said as he entered the room. He smiled serenely. "I am rather well known," he admitted modestly.

"You have given names to sleeping cars, new cigars, health foods and games—names that have pleased the public and your patrons?"

The successful man bowed.

"Well," said the spokesman, "we have a new baby at our house, and we have come to you to select a name that will please her parents, sisters and brothers, grandparents, cousins, uncles, aunts and friends of the family and herself later on."

The successful man frowned sternly. "Sir," he said, "I do not undertake the impossible!"—Cincinnati Commercial Tribune.

Telling the Weather From Mists.

The motion of mists, rapid or slow, was regarded as one of the best methods of foretelling the approach of rain or snow. When there was a mist before the rise of the full moon, if clouds were seen in the west before the sun rose or there was a mist in the fields before sunrise, wet weather was expected. When the mists vanished rapidly and the moon seemed to rise faster than usual, fine weather was sure to gladden the hearts of the merrymakers on the succeeding day. When the winds changed and the clouds flew along on "tail," the farmers predicted a storm.

Railroad Time Folders.

The average person who picks up a railroad time folder does not realize the enormous amount of work which the preparation of such a publication involves.

The big Burlington system, for instance, has a general time folder made up from sixteen different division time tables. The folder contains 2,000 names of towns, gives the schedules of over 500 trains, and whenever there is a change in time 60,000 figures have to be carefully checked and corrected.

No Smoking.

There is one country in the world where it is considered a crime to smoke —Abyssinia. The law forbidding tobacco dates from the year 1642. It was at first merely intended to prevent priests from smoking in the churches, but it was taken too literally, and nowadays even foreigners have to be careful not to be seen smoking.

Conceded It.

"There's a burglar in the house, Benjamin," said Mrs. Frett, arousing her husband in the dead of the morning. "Hear that?" she continued. "It's surely the sound of a chisel. He's a safe burglar."

"You bet he is," sleepily returned Benjamin, turning over for another nap.—Richmond Dispatch.

Couldn't Improve the Method.

Mrs. Chugwater—I'd be ashamed to sleep in church the way you do.

Mr. Chugwater—I can't help it. It's the only way I know how to sleep.—Chicago Tribune.

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